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WILD BIRDS AT HOME



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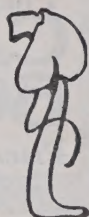
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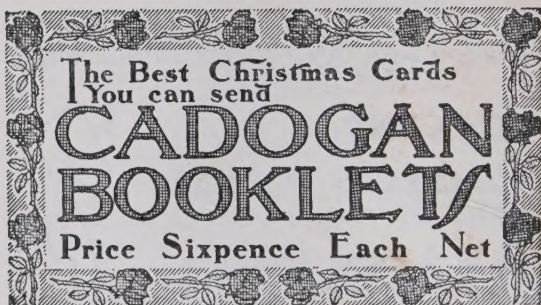
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SAND-MARTIN

NIDS D'HIRONDELLES
DE RIVAGE

NESTER DER Uferschwalbe

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DE RIVAGE

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NEST UND EIER DER Uferschwalbe (AUFGEDECKT)

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BULLFINCH



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CHOUGH

NID ET ŒUFS DU
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NEST UND EIER DER STEINKRÄHE

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JACKDAW

NID ET ŒUFS DE LA
CORNEILLE CHOUCAS

NEST UND EIER DES DOHLENRABEN

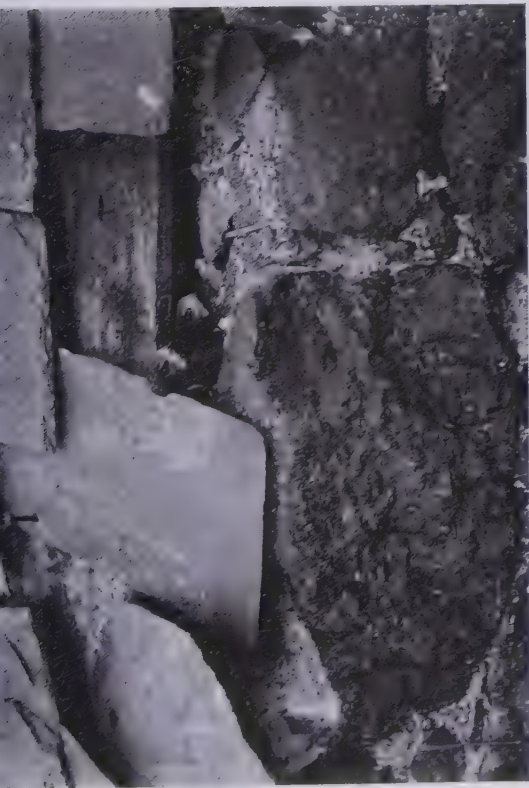
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KOLKRABE

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MARTINET NOIR

NEST (AUFGEDECKT) UND JUNGE DES MAURSEGLERS

P. Webster, Photo.



SWIFT ABOUT TO FEED
YOUNG

MARTINET NOIR SUR LE POINT DE DONNER
A MANGER A SES PETITS
MAUSERSEGLER IM BEGRIFF, SEINE JUNGEN ZU FÜTTERN



SWIFT AT ENTRANCE
OF NEST

MARTINET NOIR A L'ENTRÉE
DU NID

MAUSERSEGLER AM NESTEINGANG

P. Webster, Photo.



SWIFT AT ENTRANCE
OF NEST

MARTINET NOIR A L'ENTRÉE
DU NID

MAUSERSEGLER AM NESTEINGANG

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NESTING HOLE OF KINGFISHER

NID DU MARTIN-PÊCHEUR VULGAIRE

NEST DES EISVOGELS

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NEST AND EGGS OF KINGFISHER
(EXPOSED)

NID (EXPOSÉ) ET (EUFS DU
MARIN-PÊCHEUR



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JUNGER STEINKAUZ

JEUNE CHOUETTE CHEVÊCHE

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COMMON HERON ON NEST

HÉRON CENDRÉ SUR SON NID

FISCHREIHER AUF DEM NEST

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HÖCKERSCHWAN UND JUNGE IM NEST

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WILDENTEN
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CANARDS SAUVAGES



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MALLARDS



CANARDS SAUVAGES

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MALLARDS



NEST AND EGGS OF WATER-RAIL
(UNCOVERED)

NID (DÉCOUVERT) ET ŒUFS DU
RÂLE D'EAU

NEST (AUFGEDECKT) UND EIER DER WASSERRALLE

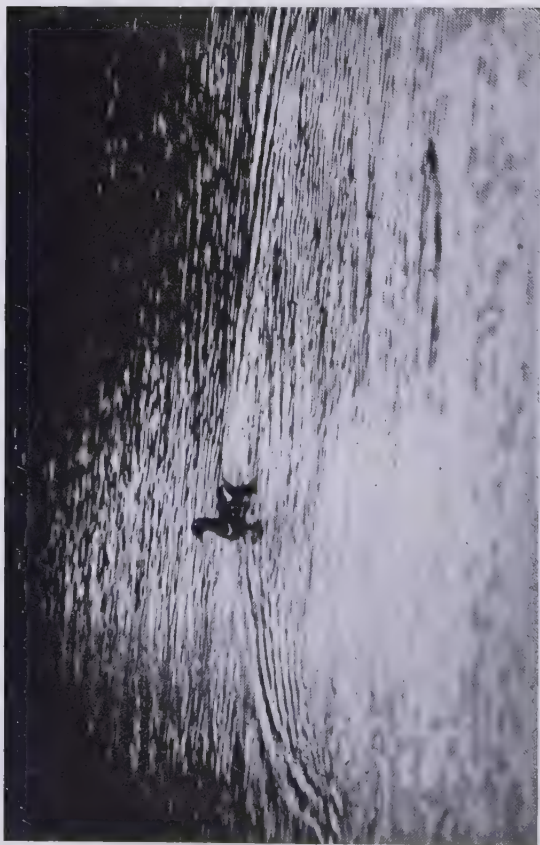
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TEICHUHN
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GALLINULE POULE D'EAU



MOOR-HEN OR WATER-HEN

TEICHHUHN

GALLINULE POULE D'EAU



NEST AND EGGS OF COMMON COOT NID ET ŒUFS DE LA FOULQUE NOIRE
NEST UND EIER DES GEMEINEN WASSERHUHNES
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NEST AND YOUNG OF REDSHANK NID ET PETITS DU CHEVALIER GAMBETTE
NEST UND JUNGE DES ROTSCHEKELS
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OISEAU TEMIÈTE ET SES PETITS
AU NID

STORM-PETREL AND YOUNG
IN NEST

KLEINER SCHWALBENSTURNVOGEL MIT JUNGEN IM NEST

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STORM-PETREL

KLEINER SCHWALBENSTURMVOGEL

OISEAU TEMPÊTE

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STORM-PELLEL



PUFFIN DES ANGLAIS QUITTANT

SON NID

MANX SHEARWATER LEAVING

NESTING HOLE

TAUCHENSTURMVOGEL VOM NEST GEHEND

P. Webster, Photo.



MANX SHEARWATER AT
ENTRANCE OF NESTING HOLE

PUFFIN DES ANGLAIS A
L'ENTRÉE DU NID

TAUCHERSTURMVOGEL AM NESTEINGANG

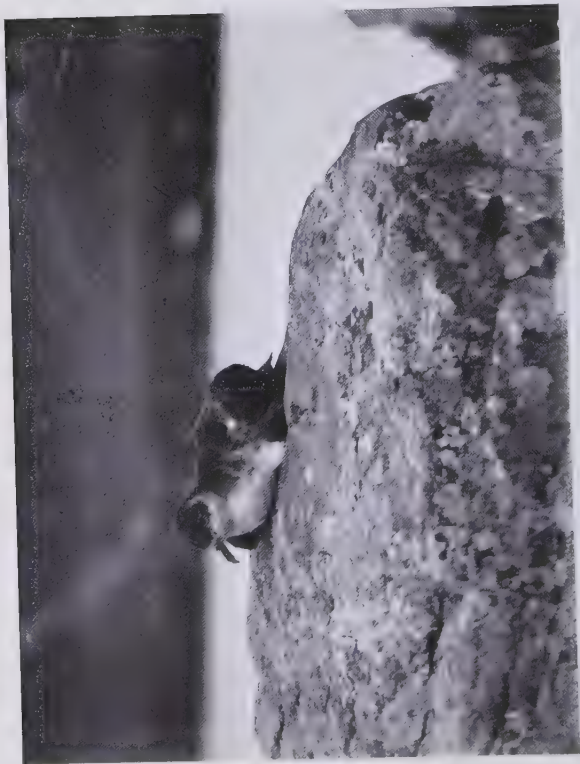
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TAUCHERSTURMVOGEL
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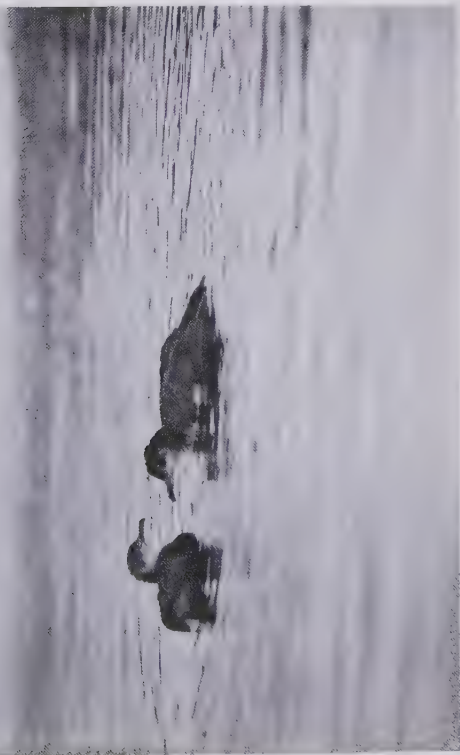
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FOURTH SERIES.

Some Notes on the Birds

OF WHICH

PHOTOGRAPHS APPEAR IN
THE PRECEDING PAGES . .

BY

PETER WEBSTER.

Bullfinch (Page 18).—The bullfinch is a common bird in England, but in Scotland and Ireland it is not so plentiful—or at all events is local. Bird-catchers never miss a chance of caging a bullfinch, since it commands a good price and is one of the simplest birds to catch, being at once attracted by the piping of the call-bird. It is a short plump bird with a very short thick beak. The adult male is very handsome, having a lovely velvety black head, wings and tail, white rump, grey shoulders, and brilliant red breast. The adult female and young of both sexes are not nearly so brightly coloured. The natural, low piping note of the bullfinch is rather monotonous, but it will pick up and whistle a tune very readily.

The nest of the bullfinch can always be identified, being constructed exclusively of small twigs ingeniously woven together. It has rather a flat appearance and is lined with fine roots and hair to receive the five blue eggs, blotched and speckled with violet and reddish-brown markings on the larger end. As a site for their nest, these birds appear to be very partial to small ornamental fir-trees planted in the centre of a lawn or flower-bed, or in a plantation.

If the young birds are taken when half-grown and put into an open cage hung up close to the original home, the old birds will faithfully tend them, and in some cases will even follow them when removed bodily to the nearest house and hung up on the wall.

Chough (Page 19).—The scarcity of the chough is perhaps one of the most striking examples at the present day of what will sooner or later happen to more of our rarer birds. When egg-collectors put a price of 5s. 6d., on each chough's egg it is little wonder that their nests are systematically plundered. The haunts of this interesting bird have been considerably reduced in numbers during the last ten years, and it is now only to be found breeding in the most secluded places of our shores. The west coasts of Scotland and Ireland are the only places where any numbers are to be found. The chough is of a

glossy black colour throughout, with red legs and beak, the latter being curved somewhat like the curlew's. The nest is placed far back in caves and crevices in the face of marine cliffs and, as a rule, in small colonies. If the first nest is robbed the pair will build a second nest; and should this again be robbed they will even in some cases (like gulls) lay a third nest; but there is usually an egg less in each successive clutch. The habits of the chough are very similar to those of the jackdaw or rook, as it feeds along the shore or in the fields. When the young are able to fly they are taken by the parent birds to some convenient ploughed field and are taught to dig for grub and worms in exactly the same way as their commoner brothers, the rooks. The call of the chough is distinguishable from that of the jackdaw, which it most resembles, by its being less harsh. It is very shrill and musical, consisting of two separate notes and appearing to say "cher-air" in two syllables similar to the jackdaw's call of "jee-ack." The nest is built with a considerable quantity of sticks and heather-roots, well lined with sheep's wool and hair. In the deep cup-shaped cavity are laid five very pale blue or cream eggs, spotted and blotched all over with indistinct markings of olive-brown and violet but more profusely at the larger end.

Coot (Page 47).—The coot, or bald-coot, as it is commonly called, like the moor-hen, is one of our commonest water fowl, although on account of its being shy its presence is often unobserved. It is to be found on almost every secluded large sheet of fresh water, and is at once distinguished from all other water fowl by its black body and bald white forehead. Gamekeepers in some districts are completely wiping this bird out of existence on account of its cannibalistic tastes. It will destroy a whole nest of duck's eggs, or even young birds, the moment the old duck's back is turned.

The foot of the coot appears to be something between the web of the duck and the clean toes of the water-hen. Each toe or claw has a small scalloped web or fin on each side of it (called lobes), but not connected to the adjoining toe like the duck's, this oddity being only common to the grebes and phalaropes in addition to the coots. The nest of the coot is very similar to that of the water-hen, being built of rushes and sedges, and placed in a clump of herbage close to, or at the water's side, or where the weeds and rushes grow well out into the water. The nest will be found to be a floating platform anchored to the surrounding weeds, but is never out of reach of the water as the water-hen's sometimes is. Several nests are at times to be found on the same sheet of water. This bird attacks all other water fowl that cross his path, and will seldom tolerate even moor-hens on the same water as itself. If a visit is paid to a coot's nest immediately before an expected flood or rise of water caused by heavy rain, it will be seen that the birds have piled up the nest with newly-plucked reeds and rushes to a great height. The nest sometimes stands two feet above the water, to ensure that the eggs will be kept dry when the water rises. Seven is an average clutch of eggs, but sometimes twice this number are found in one nest. They are of a pale dirty-stone-colour ground, speckled all over with brown. In winter these birds are to be found feeding with the wild ducks in great numbers, and are common on the seashore or about estuaries.

Goldfinch (Pages 12 and 13).—The goldfinch is another of our British birds which has had to pay dearly for being so handsomely dressed. The bird-catcher plays havoc amongst the flocks which band together after the nesting-season is over.

Having a rich brown body, red face, white cheeks with black head, neck, tail and wings—the latter being banded with yellow—it never fails to attract attention.

The young birds in their first plumage (known as grey-pates) lack the rich colouring of the older birds.

Odd pairs are to be met with breeding throughout the country, although it cannot be said to be common anywhere except in the remotest parts of Ireland. The nest, which is very similar in appearance to that of the chaffinch, although much shallower, is built of roots, covered with lichen and lined with wool or down. Fruit-trees and gardens are the most favoured sites for these exquisite little nests, also the extreme ends of long lower branches of beech or sycamore-trees. Four or five eggs form the clutch, having a very pale green ground, sparingly speckled and streaked with reddish-brown at the larger end.

Heron (Pages 33 and 39).—The heron is not by any means a rare bird, although it is nowhere common except in the immediate vicinity of a heronry, where large numbers collect to breed. The head, back and wings are of a slate-blue colour, the former and latter being edged with black in addition to the short tail. The throat and breast are white. The fully-matured bird is adorned on the breast with long white plumes tipped with black, which contrast well with its long yellow beak and legs. Gamekeepers and water bailiffs alike condemn the heron as one of the biggest poachers they have to contend with, yet on the other hand it is of great service to both. It kills (and swallows whole) quite as many rats as it does fish and young ducks. In stalking its prey, the heron stands absolutely rigid in the shallow water, on the alert for anything moving, its neck bent ready to transfix its victim with one deadly stab of its powerful beak. Frogs, newts, eels, snails, worms, rats, mice and young birds, are all equally acceptable, although eels appear to be its favourite food.

The nests vary in size, some being no larger than a rook's, while others are considerably larger and have a high wind-screen on one side. They are built at the extreme tops of trees, very often in a fir of some kind in a lonely plantation on the hills of some quiet private estate. Four bluish-green eggs are laid, often very early in the season, even in January in some cases; or on the other hand, as late as June. It is probable that two broods are reared. After the breeding-season is over the birds wander about singly from place to place in search of food.

Jackdaw (Page 23).—This familiar bird is very common and widely distributed. Its choice of a breeding-site is so varied that it is found breeding almost everywhere. In appearance it is very similar to its nearest relation—the rook—but is smaller and the adult bird has a patch of grey on the back of its head which the rook lacks.

During winter jackdaws and rooks congregate together to feed in the fields and along the shores, but when spring comes round again they separate into pairs and return to their favourite nesting-sites.

In some parts of the country jackdaws breed in large colonies in the clefts and crevices of rocky marine cliffs or in similar sites far inland. In the top of a thick fir-tree on the outskirts of a small plantation is another favourite site for a small colony. Hollow trees, church towers, old ruins, thick ivy, chimney-pots, and rabbit-burrows are all favourite sites for odd pairs. When the chosen site is small very little nest is made, but should a church-tower or large hollow tree be chosen the jackdaws appear to make it their solemn duty to fill up the whole allotted space with an enormous collection of sticks and twigs, and line one corner of this pile with hair and wool to receive four or five blue eggs, sparingly marked with bold black and dark-grey markings.

The jackdaw is supposed to have a natural weakness for anything bright or gaudy, often picking up and weaving into its nest scraps of bright-coloured or silver paper.

It makes a most interesting pet if taken from the nest young, and can occasionally be taught to talk.

Kingfisher (Pages 29 and 30).—This gorgeous bird is well known to all by name although comparatively few can claim to have seen the bird in the flesh. It is fairly well distributed throughout the country and is not nearly so rare as is imagined. The head, neck and upper side generally are of a brilliant glossy greenish-blue, and shaded red below. The bright red feet are extremely small and have two toes in front and two below similar to the parrot's. It is oftener met with in flat or low-lying districts than in a mountainous locality. The rapid tumbling mountain-streams which the dipper delights in are unsuited to the kingfisher. It is only found when the stream has widened out and runs slowly.

The kingfisher is such a shy retiring little bird that it is difficult to get more than a glimpse of it as it suddenly dashes up stream in a dead straight line close to the surface of the water, and is out of sight round the bend in the stream before you have time to realise that it really was a kingfisher. If it were not for the fact that it invariably utters its shrill little scream of alarm on catching sight of you it would often escape all but the most observant eye. When fishing it quietly sits under an overhanging bank of the stream almost hidden from view by the hanging bushes, with its big head cocked on one side watching out of one eye for its prey to swim past. When the fish is almost beneath it, it drops straight down like a stone, on top of the unsuspecting fish (which it often fails to secure) and returns to its perch to turn it round and swallow it head first.

It is very particular in choosing the site of its nesting hole, which it tunnels out in the clay bank of the streams entirely with its beak, its tiny little feet being utterly useless for such an undertaking. The tunnel is dug into the bank for about three feet and terminates in a dome-shaped chamber. No nest whatever is built, the first egg being laid on the bare soil, but as the sitting bird casts up the undigested bones of the fish which have been swallowed, quite a good bed is deposited by the time the full clutch of seven eggs have been laid.

The eggs are almost round and have a highly polished surface. When fresh the yolk shows through the semi-transparent white shell, giving them a lovely pink blush, but they are very disappointing on being blown, becoming a very commonplace white.

A kingfisher's hole can always be distinguished by its pungent odour of fish. Young kingfishers are positively hideous when their feathers first begin to grow, looking more like porcupines than birds, but by the time they emerge from their nest the repulsiveness has disappeared.

Linnet (Pages 15 and 16).—The linnet, or brown linnet as it is usually called, makes the most popular cage-bird of all our British wild birds. During the autumn and winter countless thousands are netted and trapped to be retailed to fanciers, who prize them for crossing with canaries. This sweet little songster, in its brown dress pencilled with black, in the breeding-season has a faint pink chest. It is resident with us and very common, and is to be found breeding throughout the country. Wherever gorse, whins or heather abound there too will be found the linnet, building its neat little nest with roots, hair, wool and down, to receive its four to six pale blue eggs, spotted and speckled with dull red. The favourite site for the nest is the centre of a large, solitary, dense gorse-bush, growing on moorland or waste ground. The bird is a close sitter, and will not leave the nest until the bush has been repeatedly struck.

Magpie (Pages 20-22).—The magpie is resident and very common. Single pairs are to be found breeding throughout the country, except in the immediate vicinity of towns and game-preserves. It is a born thief and will steal for the sake of stealing, often hiding bits of food in crevices in trees or under stones. It is such a notorious poacher that its presence is never tolerated within the range of the gamekeeper's gun. The magpie has a black head and shoulders and glossy greenish-black tail and wings, the shoulders and chest being barred with white.

Magpies, like all the crows, will eat almost anything, thus they need never go hungry. They have a peculiar habit of running about the ground when feeding in pairs with the head low down and the long tail sticking up in the air. They run a few steps then jerk their body up and down, at the same time flicking the tail and uttering their "laughing call."

In flight the magpie always appears to be in difficulties; its having comparatively small wings and a very long tail, gives one the impression that the bird is utterly exhausted with having to pull such a long heavy tail behind it. The magpie builds a large nest of sticks in the topmost branches of trees, either on the edge of plantations or in a solitary tree close to an isolated farm-house.

In some districts where trees are scarce the nests are built in thick hawthorn hedges, but always well concealed. The nest itself is a well-made structure of stout sticks firmly woven together and lined with mud, and when the mud has had time to dry it is again lined with roots and fibres and in addition a dome or shield of thorns is built over the top for protection, only a small hole being left at one side for entrance, which makes it exceedingly difficult to rob this nest. Usually four eggs, although at times more, are laid, of a pale-green ground very closely spotted all over with olive-brown or dark-grey to almost hide the ground-colour. They vary very much in colour and size.

There is an old fable which says that the magpies undertook to teach other birds how to build their nests, but that they never took time to finish their lesson, hence the roof on the magpie's nest only.

Mallard, the (Pages 41-43), or wild duck is common and widely distributed throughout the British Isles.

During the winter these birds collect in hundreds on large unfrequented sheets of water, where they are shot and decoyed for the market. When a "pair" are disturbed during the breeding-season the drake invariably waits for the duck to rise before him and then follows in her wake.

On the approach of the breeding-season, they separate in pairs, some going to higher ground to nest, whilst others remain round the lakes and ponds. The drake (unlike the geese and swans) forsakes his mate as soon as she commences to sit, leaving her to feed, and to attend to the eggs as best she can. The ducks overcome this apparent difficulty by plucking the down and small feathers from their breast to form a covering for the eggs whilst they are away feeding. The breast is thus quite bare, which allows of more heat being transmitted from their bodies to the eggs.

Eleven or twelve eggs form an average nest, but much larger clutches are not uncommon. They are of a pale buff or greenish colour and have a greasy surface.

The ingenuity displayed by the wild duck in successfully transferring her brood from a remote nest to the water is really wonderful.

Martin, House- (Frontispiece and Pages 6 and 7).—The house-martin, whose very existence is totally unknown to the average person, is perhaps the prettiest bird of this familiar family. Although not so common as the swallow, it is well distributed throughout our islands. The upper half is of a glossy indigo blue, while the undersides are all white, including a patch on the back just above the tail. The line of demarcation is remarkably well defined, not a gradual shading from blue to white, but an abrupt straight line from the beak to the tail. This little bird's legs are white-feathered right down to the claws. The nest of the house-martin is similar to that of the swallow, being also made of mud, but differs inasmuch as it is always closed at the top and is very deep (whereas the swallow's is open and very shallow), the martin entering through a small hole in the side. Several nests are often built about farms, in top corners of upper window-frames, or under the eaves of a roof. Very large colonies, consisting of several hundreds of nests, are at times to be found high up and close together in sheltered corners of sea-cliffs in certain parts of the country. The nest is built up patiently by the old birds with small particles of mud, which they gather up from the pools or moist places on the roadside, and carry in their beaks to the nesting-site. In dry weather they often travel considerable distances to find suitable soft mud. At such times they will readily take advantage of a little friendly assistance in the form of a pail of water poured on to the dry road to make some artificial mud.

These birds are endowed by nature with special salivary glands in their throats, which enable them to mix the small pellets of mud with saliva (probably unconsciously while carrying it), which imparts to it a wonderful adhesive power. When the mud nest is quite dry, it is remarkably hard and strong. The nest is lined with straw and feathers to receive the clutch of three pure white eggs.

A very remarkable feature about the house-martin's nest is that when once the eggs are laid and the bird starts sitting, there will invariably be found a small, hard-backed insect somewhat like a

spider (*Stemopteryx hirundinis*), either in the nest or attached to one of the old birds, which remains with them until the young leave the nest. The probable explanation of this is that the spider feeds on the small lice and parasites which infest these birds and is tolerated as a friend in the nest by the martin.

Martin. Sand- (Pages 8-11).—Is the earliest of the swallow tribe to return to our shores. It usually arrives a fortnight or three weeks before the swallow. The first arrivals are often mistaken for exceptionally early swallows.

In appearance it is very similar to the swallow but is smaller, being without the long tail feathers, and is only $4\frac{1}{2}$ inches in length. The head, wings and back are of a dark brown colour, which graduates into a white underside, with a white ring round the neck. Although rather local, it is a very common bird where suitable nesting-ground is available. It burrows out a tunnel for itself in the face of a sandy river-bank, sand quarries, railway embankments, and like places. The length of this tunnel varies according to the nature of the earth in which it is dug. In fairly soft ground it will often go as far as 4 feet in, whilst in hard ground the bird is content with 18 inches to 2 feet. It is astonishing how such a fragile little creature ever manages to excavate these long burrows with nothing but a pair of very tiny red feet and a soft bill. The tunnel is greater in width than height, slopes upward, and is enlarged at the end to receive the nest of straw and feathers. Four or five pure white eggs are laid, which cannot be distinguished with certainty from those of the house-martin.

Moor-hen, the (Pages 45 and 46), or water-hen as it is usually called, is one of our commonest water fowls, spending the whole year on our parks, lakes, ponds, and streams. It has a slate and brown body with white-tipped wings and tail, and a bright red blaze on its forehead. It can always be easily distinguished on either land or water. When on the former, by its dainty step with a constant flicking of its white tail; when swimming, from its habit of jerking out its head and drawing it back with every stroke of its feet—very like the common goose when swimming.

It feeds on numbers of tender roots and seeds, insects, and worms.

When disturbed it flies a short distance away with its legs hanging down, but never goes far. It is an adept at skulking out of sight, under the overhanging bank-sides, and will often dive beneath the surface and swim a considerable distance along the bottom, making use of its wings to accelerate its movements.

It is at times a mystery to know what has become of a whole family of moor-hens which were feeding together a few seconds previous to when the old bird suddenly gave the alarm note.

The young are all black and have enormous legs and feet, each claw being almost as large as the young bird itself. They can swim as soon as they are born although they have not webbed feet. Seven to ten eggs of a pale stone-colour blotched and speckled with dull red are laid in a basket like nest built of dry reeds and rushes. Occasionally moor hens nest in trees and bushes, but only after they have been disturbed on the ground by rats or other vermin.

Owl, Little (Pages 31 and 32).—The little owl is fairly common, but local, being only found breeding in the Midlands and South of England, never wandering far away. This odd little creature is really not a true British bird, having been imported at different times from the Continent and liberated in Hampshire and Northamptonshire, the first lot as long as 65 years ago. Since then, however, they have been allowed to breed, until now they are a well-established species. The little owl is only $8\frac{1}{2}$ inches in length and is of a light-brown colour, spotted and striped with white. The legs are covered with short hair like feathers right down to the claws.

A very peculiar habit of this bird is the restless manner in which it bobs up and down. It will sit crouched down with bent shoulders and blink its eyes for two or three minutes on end without moving its body and then suddenly jerk itself bolt-upright, craning its neck to the utmost and jerking out its head sideways as though it were trying to see past someone sitting in front of it, then down it bobs again to repeat the same performance after a minute or two's rest.

The eggs of the little owl are almost round and pure white, three to five being laid in a very poor apology for a nest. The site of the nest varies almost as much as that of the common sparrow. In ruins, outhouses, rocks, ivy, burrows, hollow trees or the bare open ground.

Petrel, Storm- (Pages 49-54). (also known as "Mother Carey's chicken").—This is the smallest of the web-footed birds, being only six inches in length. It spends its whole life at sea, merely coming to land for a short period each season to breed. It is extremely local, being only found in a few favoured parts of our shores, but at these particular haunts these gentle little creatures are found in thousands. It is of a dull, sooty-black colour, relieved with a little white on the rump. Being a night feeder, it is seldom seen abroad through the day, unless at some considerable distance from land. During a prolonged spell of bad weather, however, petrels are not infrequently seen for days together inside the harbours flitting on the troubled surface of the water, apparently collecting small floating globules of oil.

The breeding-ground of the petrels may be repeatedly visited without their presence being detected. In the majority of cases they creep under the large boulders scattered about the shores of some wild, unfrequented island, and worm their way under the smaller stones until they reach the solid ground, where they scratch a slight hollow, or very often lay their single white egg with its zone of faint lavender specks on the bare rock, the nest in some cases being quite ten feet below the surface of the stones and boulders. Another favourite site is in the soft peaty soil, in which they scratch a burrow for themselves, or use an old puffin burrow.

The old birds when taken from the nests make no attempt to escape, being apparently too dazed by the daylight. When put on a flat rock, they rest with the whole of the fore-legs on the ground, or, in other words, appear to walk on the knee-joints. On being thrown into the air, they make off across the water in a very erratic manner, flying close to the surface and wobbling about from side to side, similarly to a bat.

A very remarkable feature of the storm-petrel is that comparatively few birds have perfect feet. Either a whole claw, or a portion of one is missing, or in some cases it is very much dwarfed or deformed,

Raven (Page 24).—Is the largest member of the crow family, being 26 inches in length. It is now only to be found breeding in the wildest and most mountainous parts of the country, although at one time it was not uncommon as a British nesting bird. In colour the raven is a glossy black throughout. It has a very powerful beak adorned with whisker-like bristles. Like all the crows, it is very cunning and distrustful of man, which makes it almost impossible to trap it, more especially so when once it reaches maturity. The raven is such a powerful, bold and hungry bird, waging a constant war on rabbits, hares and lambs, that gamekeepers and shepherds alike show it no mercy, endeavouring to shoot or trap it throughout the year irrespective of the close season. An old raven would rather starve than touch a piece of meat or a rabbit that had the least suspicion of a trap or a snare about it. It is gifted with wonderful sight and smell and never fails to detect carrion.

The nesting-site is usually on an inaccessible face of a sea-cliff, either in a hole or a crack, or on a well-protected ledge, no attempt being made at concealment. The raven's nest is a very bulky structure, often being quite 4 feet in diameter and composed of a whole cart-load of thick sticks, which to all appearance look as though they were merely thrown together, but in reality are very firmly interwoven. The nest slopes up towards the top, with a very deep cup-shaped hollow in the centre, thickly lined with wool and hair. The four to seven eggs, which are comparatively small for the size of the bird, are coloured very similarly to rooks' eggs and are laid in March, or even as early as February in some cases, it being quite a usual occurrence for the nest and sitting bird to be covered with snow, which does not appear to affect the eggs in the least.

Redpoll, Lesser (Page 17).—During the winter the lesser redpoll is one of the commonest members of the finch family, roaming about in large flocks, but during the breeding-season it is rather local and is even scarce in the south and south-west of England. It is really a much commoner bird than is generally supposed, on account of its being mistaken for the linnet.

In appearance it is somewhat similar to the latter, but is smaller, the pencilling is darker, and it has a red blaze on the forehead, and a black patch under the beak. The redpoll makes a delightful little cage-bird, being easily taught to perform tricks.

The nest in the majority of cases is placed in the extreme top of a hawthorn hedge, well concealed in the smaller branches. In some districts, however, it prefers a small plantation, when the nest will be found in the fork of a tree, but is seldom more than six feet above the ground. The nest itself is an exquisite production, being after the style of the chaffinch's, but smaller. It is built of roots, twigs and moss lined with down, hair and wool. Four to six small blue eggs are laid, which are speckled and blotched with reddish-brown and violet, more profusely on the larger end.

Redshank (Page 48).—This is one of the commonest members of the wader family. It is to be found throughout the British Isles, but is most plentiful in the wild undrained fen districts. The numbers are considerably increased by migratory birds in hard weather.

Provided with long red stilt-like legs and a long pointed beak, it seeks its food wading and swimming in the soft slimy mud round

the edges of lakes, rivers, and estuaries, and on the coast. It spends more than half the year round the seashore, but on the approach of spring the bird travels far inland to breed. In general appearance it is of a very pale brown or grey colour, beautifully striped and ticked with darker brown on the back and wings. When in flight it appears to be almost white. A very slight but well concealed nest is made to receive the four pointed eggs, which are very similar to those of the common plover, being of a buff-colour ground speckled and blotched with rich dark-brown. The old birds are very demonstrative when the nest is approached and almost lead you to it in their anxiety to entice you away.

Shearwater, Manx (Pages 58-64).—Presumably so called from the way in which it cuts the water with its breast and feet when it attempts to rise off the surface. The shearwater cannot rise straight up from the water like other seabirds, but has to fly along the surface of the water for some considerable distance before it gets sufficient way on to lift it clear of the surface.

Although this bird breeds in colonies, it is more or less of rare occurrence, not from the fact, however, that the birds are absent, but more probably for the reason that it is a night bird, and is overlooked.

The predominating colour of the shearwater is dull sooty-black on the upper side, and white below, the breast being extremely closely feathered with satin-like feathers. Being purely a water bird, it is totally unable to walk on land. When forced to try, however, by taking a grip of the ground with its hooked beak it manages to drag one leg along after the other in a very ungainly wobble. It is like some of the other seabirds inasmuch as it cannot rise off the level ground when it wants to fly, but must get on to the edge of a rock and literally throw itself off after it has spread its wings.

The shearwater usually nests on the face of some solitary high-standing island, and burrows out a tunnel (similar to the puffin) in the peaty deposits on the ledges of precipitous sea-cliffs, at the end of which it lays its solitary pure white egg, which has a remarkably highly polished surface, almost like porcelain. Very little nest is made, merely a few blades of peculiar marine grass which is evidently an article of diet. In some cases, the egg is laid on the bare ground. These birds never on their own accord enter or leave their burrows in daylight, although they are at times seen during the day as far as ten miles out at sea. Whether these are old birds that have been unable to get back to their nests before daylight appeared or whether they are female birds out feeding who have left their mates to perform the duties of incubation, is doubtful.

Should anyone have the good fortune to spend a night on an island tenanted by shearwaters, he is likely to remember it to his dying day, so weird is the experience. With most surprising punctuality night after night, they emerge from their burrows at precisely the same hour to indulge in the most unearthly and awe-inspiring shrieks and cries. The only sound that in any way approaches the call of the shearwater is a long drawn-out agonising bray of a donkey. Standing on the cliff-tops with these ghostly and almost invisible apparitions crying all round you, echoed and re-echoed from far out to sea, inland, overhead, and out of the very bowels of the earth, is enough to try the nerves of the most enthusiastic naturalist.

Sparrow, House- (Page 14).—"The common sparrow!"—What a world of contempt is expressed with the very mention of this familiar bird's name! And why? "So common!" "So destructive!" "And such a nuisance, with his perpetual noisy chirp." There is no doubt that the flocks of sparrows which visit the fields of cut and ripening grain every autumn consume a certain amount, and perhaps an odd bird or so does destroy fruit-blossom in the spring. But, on the other hand, "What of all the good they do during a season?" The amount of grubs, caterpillars, beetles, etc., that a single sparrow destroys would do infinitely more harm to the gardener and farmer than any number of sparrows. In proportion to his size, the sparrow has more brain than any other member of the feathered tribe. There is no question about his requiring it, for his acuteness alone saves him from the ever-threatening doom at the hand of his biggest enemy (and benefactor), man!

The nesting-habits of the sparrow are familiar to all. Whether the nest is under a roof, in a hole in a wall, in thick ivy, in a haystack, or in a hedge, it is never difficult to find and examine the four or five greyish-white eggs, spotted and speckled with varying amounts of black and brown.

Swan, Mute (Page 40).—Although the swan is not, strictly speaking, a wild bird, it is nevertheless to be found roaming about during the winter in a perfectly wild state. During hard or even very bleak weather the old birds, in addition to the unpaired young, collect to feed on the most sheltered and open waters. In certain favoured parts it is not an uncommon sight to see twenty or thirty swans busily feeding here to-day, while they will be miles away the next day.

It is a wonderful sight to see a flock of swans taking flight. On rising from the surface of the water, they circle round the lake two or three times until they attain a fair height, and then strike off in a straight line with their long necks fully extended. The first impression received on unexpectedly seeing swans on the wing is that they are some species of birds flying "backwards"! Their extremely long thin necks thrust straight out, wings far back on the large body, and apparently no tail, all tend to give something totally different from what we would expect from the stately swan.

The swan builds each season a new nest, which is very large, and placed on a small island, or floats amongst the rushes growing on the water's edge. It is generally in their third year that young birds start laying. Three eggs is an average number for the first clutch. In the majority of cases the clutch is increased by one egg each successive season, until in the fifth breeding season seven eggs are laid—this forming the usual number for an old bird. In some exceptional cases, however, a single bird has been known to produce twelve eggs in one season. Should there be a weakling in the brood of cygnets, the old male bird will kill and bury it, rather than see it lag behind its brothers in developing.

Swift (Pages 25-28).—The swift is the largest of the members of the swallow family which visit our shores annually. It can always be distinguished by its size and superior powers of flight. The swift is of a dull black or brownish colour unrelieved by any quantity of white (as are the swallows and martins). It has very large eyes and a mouth that reaches "from ear to ear."

This bird has very small feet, but the claws, all four of which are in front, are very powerful, thus enabling it to go to sleep clinging to a comparatively smooth face of rock that would baffle any other bird. When the business of incubation is commenced the birds are not seen so much through the day. While the female is sitting on the eggs, the male travels considerable distances and usually spends the day feeding over some large sheet of water, but with the approach of dusk (and also in the early morning) they return home and are to be seen darting about in twos and threes at lightning speed. Just before darkness sets in they are joined for a short while by their sitting mates who unite in the mad race over the house-tops or high up in the clouds, according to where flies and insects are to be found, the whole flock screaming and screeching like a band of schoolboys let loose.

The male bird feeds his sitting partner whilst on the nest.

The swift lays one, or in some cases two pure white eggs, very much elongated, in the rudest of nests, merely a small heap of short straws, feathers and mud or dirt caked together, placed far back under some old roof, the bird entering and leaving through a very small hole under the slates. The young birds in their first plumage are of a greyish-black, each feather being edged with white.

Water-rail (Page 44).—The water-rail is so very much like the corn-crake in habit and shape that in many cases it escapes identification. The adult bird, however, has a red beak and is slate-and-chocolate-coloured, as compared with the light sandy-brown colour of the corn-crake. It is resident and well distributed throughout the country, although nowhere common, except perhaps in some parts of Ireland. It is an extremely shy bird, skulking away under cover of the sedges and rushes when disturbed, and is very seldom seen, except possibly in the nesting-season whilst its nest is being searched for. It is then sometimes set up unexpectedly, whereupon it flies over the nearest hedge and alights in the next field, trusting more to its feet than its wings to escape with. This bird haunts low-lying, swampy ground, overgrown with rank sedges and coarse grass, and although it has not web feet it is every bit as much at home in the water as on dry land. Its nest is usually well concealed in a large tuft of coarse grass, standing sufficiently high above the swamp-water to keep the eggs dry. Six to ten eggs, of a pale stone-colour, sparingly spotted with small dull-red markings, are laid on the solidly-built nest of coarse grasses. A peculiar feature of the water-rail's eggs is that they are very often pointed at both ends. A favourite site for these nests is in a field of about one acre in extent, having a low marshy corner well overgrown with reeds and coarse grass. It is usually an impossibility to take one of them without getting wet up to the middle. At times we hear of a remarkable early nest of the corn-crake being found, even before the bird is heard craking. These early nests are not corn crakes' at all, but are those of the water-rail, which, being resident, nests quite a month earlier than the migratory corn-crake.

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